

RADIO SILENCE

By Laremy Lee

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Cast
(in order of appearance)

CHARLIE
BOON
The CAPTAIN
JOHN
The ENCIK
The SERGEANT
The RADIO

Performances

This play was first staged by Wild Rice from 20 to 24 Aug 2008 at the Esplanade Theatre Studio, Singapore, as part of the OCBC Singapore Theatre Festival 2008.

Cast

Nick Shen as CHARLIE

Nelson Chia as BOON

Hansel Tan as The CAPTAIN

Jonathan Lum as JOHN

Hang Qian Chou as The ENCIK

Dwayne Lau as The SERGEANT

Ghazali Muzakir as YUSUF/The RADIO

Terence Tay as JUSTIN

Director

Jonathan Lim

Set Design

Ric Liu and Jonathan Lim

Lighting Design

Kala Raman

Sound Design

Bang Wenfu

Costume Design

Baey Ee Ming

Hair Design

Ashley Lim

Makeup Design

M.A.C.

Producer

Tony Trickett

Production Manager

Purpink Chung

Technical Manager

Teo Kuang Han

Production Coordinator

Athena Roxanne Tan

Stage Manager

Alycia Finley

Assistant Stage Manager

Leo Lei Yu

Stage Assistants

Dennis Chew, Jasmine Leong, Juraidah Rahman

Props Mistress
Fiona Lim

Lighting Operator
Toh Lin

Sound Operator
Grace Chua

Wardrobe Mistress
Nurhidayah Mahadi

Wardrobe Assistant
Jasmine Teo

Dressers
Luo Ruo and Donna Ngee

SCENE ONE

Two soldiers sitting in a vehicle. They are facing the stage.

Charlie Eh Sir, are you sure we are going in the correct direction?

Boon Yes, we are. I am sure of that.

Charlie Then... May I ask where we are going?

Boon We are going to the location that they asked us to go to.

Charlie Who is 'they'?

Boon They? Oh, higher headquarters, I guess.

Charlie Who is in the 'higher headquarters'?

Boon I... really don't know. Why are you asking so many questions?

CHARLIE turns to look at BOON as he speaks.

Charlie I dunno, just curious.

Boon (*agitatedly*) Eh, be careful over there, the tree! Why don't you just keep your eyes on the road and stop asking so many questions?

Charlie Huh... Okay.

Silence.

Charlie But aren't you curious to find out where we are going?

Boon No.

Charlie Why?

Boon Because I already know where we are going.

Charlie So where are we going?

Boon We are going to... this point here, on the map.

CHARLIE turns to look at the map.

Charlie Where?

Boon Eh, Charlie, the road! Do you want to get us killed?

Charlie No, no, no, I'm so sorry – it's my fault.

Silence.

Charlie So... Have you ever been to wherever we are going to now?

Boon No.

Charlie Then how do you know that where we are going is the correct place?

Boon You just... plot the route between your start point and end point and follow that route!

Charlie Oh.

Silence.

Charlie So...

Boon No.

Charlie No what?

Boon No, you can't take a smoke break.

Charlie But I don't smoke.

Boon Oh. But I thought all drivers smoke?

CHARLIE turns to look at BOON.

Charlie You crazy ah?

Boon The road! The road! *(Pause.)* Geez man, you nearly hit the wild boar!

Charlie Sorry, sorry, sorry! I'm really sorry.

Boon This is the last time, I'm serious.

Charlie Okay, okay.

Silence.

Charlie Well, not all drivers smoke. At least, I know I don't smoke.

Boon Then what did you want to ask me?

Charlie Before you interrupted me?

Boon Yes, what did you want to ask me, before I interrupted you, as you have so kindly pointed out?

Charlie Eh sir, you are too nice already! Actually I just wanted to ask you why we are going there?

Boon Higher HQ said we were to go there and radio them once we arrive, and we will get further orders then.

Silence.

Charlie Why do we have to wait –

Boon You want me to do it now?

Charlie Oh, no, no, no! Don't have to.

Silence.

Charlie Actually...

Boon Okay, I'll do it if it makes you happy, alright.

Charlie Wah sir, you are really too nice!

Boon And so they say.

Charlie 'They'? Who is 'they'?

Boon (*speaking into the radio*) Hello, HQ, come in.

The sound of static.

Boon Hello, HQ, please come in.

Charlie Wah sir you are so polite –

Boon Shut up.

The sound of static.

Boon Hello, HQ, come in.

The sound of static.

Charlie I think they are taking a smoke break.

Boon I'll try again later. Make a left turn here and keep on going straight.

Charlie Okay.

Silence.

Fadeout.

SCENE TWO

Same setting as before.

Boon Hello, HQ, come in.

The sound of static.

Charlie Eh Sir, are you sure we are going in the correct direction?

Boon Yes, we are. I am very sure of that.

Charlie Then... How come we passed that tree again?

Boon Did we?

Charlie Yes, we did.

Boon How do you know?

Charlie I recognise the tree.

Boon But all trees look the same.

Charlie How often do you see trees with no leaves?

Silence.

Charlie So how, sir? Are we lost?

Boon No, we are not lost. We just...

Charlie Have to follow the route between the start point and end point?

Boon Yes –

Charlie But maybe the route was wrong to begin with?

Boon Look, we're not lost, alright! I know where we are going. Just drive by my directions and we'll get there. Make a right turn here. *(Pause.)* Now turn left.

Silence.

Charlie Sir.

Boon Yes?

Charlie We passed the tree again.

Boon Okay, maybe it's... maybe it's a new season, so the trees are shedding their leaves.

Charlie But we only have one season.

Boon Then, I don't know – maybe it's a new kind of tree, one that doesn't have leaves.

Silence.

Charlie We're lost right?

Boon We're not lost!

Charlie See lah, it's all your fault, why didn't you stop and ask for directions?

Boon It's a jungle! How do you ask for directions?

Charlie *(turning to BOON)* Of course not in here, you can radio back and –

Boon Charlie! The tree!

Blackout.

SCENE THREE

Spotlight opens on a CAPTAIN standing in the middle of the stage, in front of a map mounted on a stand. He is very prim and proper – think British stiff upper lip. A younger BOON is sitting in the audience.

Captain Good morning, gentlemen. My name is Captain Richard, Richard Quah Buay Tio, and... *(pause)* what is so funny, may I ask?

Boon Nothing, sir.

Captain Good, then stop laughing, sit up and pay attention. As I was saying, gentlemen, I am your instructor for today.

Today's lesson is about map-reading, and because *I* am a specialist in maps, *I* have been chosen to tell you all about maps.

Map-making, or cartography, is the art and science of expressing the known physical features of the earth graphically by maps and charts.

The most pressing demands for accuracy and detail in mapping have come as the result of military needs.

Today, the complexities of tactical operations are such that it is essential for all soldiers to be able to read and interpret their maps in order to move effectively on the battlefield.

So, the key to success in land navigation is to know your location on the map in relation to the ground at all times; hence, the need for the lesson we are having today.

Now, before I begin, are there any questions?

Boon Sir.

Captain Yes, Boon?

Boon Sir, why is the map upside down?

Captain It's not upside down, you fool!

Boon Shouldn't 'North' point upwards?

Captain The map...

The CAPTAIN turns to look at the map. He flips it the correct way up.

Captain *(slightly irritated)* Okay. Now, are there any other questions?

Boon Sir.

Captain Yes, Boon.

Boon Sir, which area will we be studying today?

Captain Why, we will be studying the training grounds we normally use.

Boon Sir...

Captain Yes?

Boon I think you've got the map of Batam instead.

The CAPTAIN turns to look at the map. He flips it around to show the correct map.

Captain *(visibly flustered)* Okay, I am going to start soon but before I do, are there any more –

Boon Sir –

Captain What!

Boon Er... Nevermind, it's alright.

Silence. The CAPTAIN composes himself.

Captain Well, then. On with the lesson proper. As I mentioned, gentlemen, the key to success in land navigation is very, very simple...

Fadeout.

SCENE FOUR

The lights come on dimly and slowly on the two soldiers in the vehicle. BOON is unconscious and CHARLIE is trying to wake him up.

Charlie Sir, are you okay? Sir. Are you okay? Sir...

Boon *(faintly)* ...the key...

Charlie What key?

Boon *(a bit louder)* ...the key...

Charlie What key, sir?

Boon ...the key...

Charlie *(emphatically)* Puki¹ lah, sir! What key?

Boon *(wakes up)* Huh? What key?

Charlie The key!

Boon What key?

Charlie The key, the key! Whatever goddamn key you were telling me about while you were unconscious.

Boon ...Oh.

Charlie So?

Boon I don't know. What key?

Charlie Aiyah!

Silence. CHARLIE goes back to his side of the vehicle.

Boon How long was I unconscious for?

¹ Malay for "cunt".

Charlie I don't know. You were still unconscious when I woke up.

Boon Then did you hear anything on the radio?

Charlie No. Nothing at all.

Boon Shit, man. Radio silence all the way. What are we going to do now? I told you to keep your eyes on the road.

Charlie I told you we were lost.

Boon We're not lost!

Charlie Then where are we now?

Silence.

Boon I'll try the radio again. *(Pause.)* Hello, HQ, come in.

The sound of static.

Boon Hello, HQ, come in.

The sound of static.

Boon Hello, HQ, come in, goddammit!

The sound of static.

Charlie I'll get out and look around.

Boon I'll go with you.

They exit the vehicle.

Fadeout.

SCENE FIVE

A forest. Enter BOON and CHARLIE.

Boon Where are we?

Charlie We are... lost?

Silence.

Boon Stop saying that.

Charlie What?

Boon That we are lost.

Charlie Why? But we are lost. Why can't we say it for what it is?

Boon Just... Don't say it.

Charlie Okay...

Enter three other soldiers from the opposite direction. All of them notice each other.

Boon }
John } (together) HALT!

Boon Identify yourselves!

John Put your weapons down!

Boon }
John } (together) Put your hands in the air!

Silence.

John ...Boon?

Boon ..John?

John Hey, Boon, it's you! Boon Beng Ann! Except on your nametag it's B. A. Boon. Baboon! (*laughs*) We all used to get a kick out of that.

Boon Yes, it's me! How are you John? It's been so long, hasn't it?

John Yeah, it's been a while!

Silence.

Boon How have you been?

John Good, good. And you?

Boon Great. I've never been better.

Charlie (*aside*) Are you sure, you bloody baboon.

John Good, good. That's good to hear.

Silence.

John So... What have you been up to?

Boon Oh, nothing much. You?

John Same, same. Not much either.

Boon Oh... I see.

John Yar.

Silence.

Boon Okay, guess I should make a move first.

John Oh, yar. I also have to go already.

Boon Okay then, let's catch up again some day.

John Sure, sure. Why not.

BOON and CHARLIE make way for JOHN and his soldiers to leave.

Boon Hey... By the way –

John Yes?

BOON pulls JOHN towards him and they speak together.

Boon What are you guys doing here?

John Oh. Er, well, we're... We're out on a patrol. You?

Boon Well, we're supposed to go somewhere too, but...

John But?

Boon We're lost. I don't know where we are, and I don't want to tell my guy that.

John Oh.

Boon Do you know where we are?

John Actually... No.

Boon Then how do you know where you are going?

John I don't know. We're lost too, but I didn't want to tell my guys that either.

Boon Then where are you headed to now?

John We're just gonna head North. I'm sure we'll hit something on the map eventually. The key is to look confident and pretend that you know where you are going. They'll believe you. And when you finally hit something, you just pretend that you knew it all along.

Boon Okay...

John Good luck, man. We'll meet up soon.

Boon Yeah sure, why not.

Exit JOHN and his soldiers.

Charlie So?

Boon We aren't lost.

Charlie Did you ask for directions?

Boon Yes.

Charlie Then did he give you directions?

Boon Yes. He told me what to do. Let's go.

BOON starts walking but CHARLIE does not move.

Boon Charlie?

Charlie Sir.

Boon Aren't you coming? I know where to go.

Charlie Why are we heading that way?

Boon I know where we are going.

Silence. CHARLIE turns on his heel and exits. BOON stands alone.

Boon Hello, HQ, come in, please.

The sound of static.

Fadeout.

SCENE SIX

A board with diagrams in the centre of the stage. A younger BOON is sitting in the audience. The ENCİK strides purposefully on stage.

Encik Good afternoon, genner-men. My name is Warrant Officer Gan Kan Kok and... *(Pause.)* Eh, fuck you understand, that soldier over there. Wipe that fucking smile off your face. What's so funny? *(Pause.)* Right, as I was saying: my name is Warrant Officer Gan. But you can call me Encik.

Today, I am your instructor, and we will be learning on military communications. More specifically, we will focus on 'lelio silence'. Now, can anyone tell me what lelio silence is? *(Pause.)* Yes, you over there.

Boon It means when the radio is silent.

Encik Idiot! Wake up your idea, understand! This kind of thing even my grandmother also know! You drop and give me twenty!

Boon Yes, encik!

BOON can be heard audibly counting out the push-ups as he does them.

Encik Nowsadays you soldiers ah, all like fucking gorblocks. Anyway, back to my question. *(Pause.)* Er... What was my question ah?

Boon Does anyone know what radio silence is?

Encik You again! Who say you can speak? Want to play 'punk' with me right? You see that tree over there?

Boon No, encik!

Encik You go and run and touch that tree and come back!

Boon Encik, which tree?

Encik Doesn't matter, they are all the same!

Exit BOON.

Encik So as I was saying, in military communications, lelio silence is a period in which all fixed or mobile lelio stations in an area stop transmitting. What this means...

Enter BOON.

Boon Permission to join in, encik.

Encik Join in. And keep your bloody mouth shut, understand? (*Pause.*) So as I was saying, basically, what lelio silence means is: when the lelio is silent.

Generally, lelio stations include anything capable of transmitting a lelio signal, which include the lelio sets we use to communicate.

Now, if we are supposedly to communicating using our lelios, then can anyone exactly tell me why we have lelio silence?

Silence.

Encik Eh, I said *tell* me why we have lelio silence, not *gimme* lelio silence, understand?

Silence.

Encik Fucking hell, all you mother cheebye all graduate with 'Air' level, that's why inside your brain only got 'Air', right?

(Pause.)

Ahhh, nehmind: don't waste time. Lelio silence apply when any lelio transmission is possibly to may revealing troop positions, either from the sound of talking, or when the signal it emit is detected.

Which means that: all you son of mother don't anyhowly talk over the lelio, so that we don't give our position away.

Is that clear?

Silence.

Fadeout.

SCENE SEVEN

BOON and CHARLIE are in the vehicle.

Charlie Sir?

Boon Yes?

Charlie Do you have any more water?

Boon Yes. I have a bit left.

Charlie Oh.

Silence.

Charlie Do you think... You are you going to drink it?

Boon Yes.

Charlie Aiyah. Like that ah.

Silence.

Charlie Sir.

Boon What?

Charlie Do you think...

Boon No.

Charlie Why?

Boon Why didn't you exercise water discipline and control your water intake?

Charlie Why did you get us lost in the first place?

Boon I didn't...

Silence.

Charlie Sir.

Boon myself! I said no, Charlie! If I give you the water I'm not going to have any left for myself!

Charlie Why are you so selfish?

Boon Why are *you* so selfish?

Charlie So if I die, you won't care lah?

Boon Then if I die? Will you care?

Charlie Of course. But I also must think about my own survival.

Boon So does it mean I must let you survive at my expense?

Charlie What makes you think your survival is more important than mine?

Boon Is it not? I was trained to lead.

Charlie But if you survive, you are just going to survive to lead other people and get them lost again!

Boon Stop it with the getting lost thing, alright! It's not funny anymore!

Charlie I never said it was! And if it were, I'd be making noise together with all the bloody grasshoppers and crickets over there!

Boon If you are so smart, why don't you read the damn map and get us out of here then?

Charlie Because I was not trained to read maps! I was trained to drive. I did my job, what about you?

Silence. BOON hands his bottle to CHARLIE.

Boon Take it.

CHARLIE grabs the bottle and gulps down the water hastily and noisily.

Boon Slowly! I don't know how long we are going to be here for.

CHARLIE stops drinking and looks at BOON.

Boon Hello, HQ, come in, please.

The sound of static.

Fadeout.

SCENE EIGHT

The same setting, but it is darker, and this time BOON and CHARLIE look weaker and are sprawled in the seats of the vehicle.

Boon Hello, HQ, come in, please.

The sound of static.

Charlie Don't bother lah, sir. They are not coming.

Boon Must try, no matter what. Cannot give up.

A rumbling sound is heard.

Boon What's that?

Charlie Me. My stomach. I tak boleh tahan already lah, sir. Too hungry, already. You not hungry meh?

Boon Hungry, of course I'm hungry. But we don't have any rations, so what do we eat?

Silence. BOON and CHARLIE turn to look at each other.

Charlie Eat grass?

Boon Tsk. Fuck you lah, Charlie! Not everything is a joke alright?

Charlie I didn't say it was a joke!

(Silence.)

I thought that's what they taught you all in the jungle survival course? Eat grass?

Boon No. They mainly taught us to kill animals.

Charlie Huh! Why so cruel?

Boon Why is it cruel? For one to survive, one must die.

Charlie But how can you sacrifice another's life just for your own?

Boon So it's alright for me to sacrifice my life for yours, but it's not alright for an animal to sacrifice its life for yours?

Charlie But the animal didn't get us lost.

Boon I...!

Silence.

Boon It's the same thing as what's on your plate during meals, isn't it. Only thing is, this time you're the one doing the killing.

Charlie Sir?

Boon Yes?

Charlie I'm vegetarian.

Silence. BOON stares at CHARLIE. A rumbling sound is heard.

Fadeout.

SCENE NINE

A tethering pole with a rope drooping from it next to a table in the centre of the stage. There is a sack on the table. A younger BOON is sitting in the audience. Enter the SERGEANT.

Sergeant Okay, good evening soldiers, my name is Sergeant Vinod and – dei, thambi! What's so funneh about my name?

Boon Nothing, sergeant!

Sergeant You don't try and bluff me, ah, I am eight years in the army already – une, rende, munne, naale, anje, arre, yerre, yette – eight, and I know when you soldiers are bluffing. Tell me: what is so funneh about my name?

Boon *(stifling laughter)* Sergeant, your name... It's not funny.

Sergeant Aiyoh, of course my name is not funneh da! You think everyone here in the Army is born with a funneh name is it?

Boon No, Sergeant!

Sergeant Then what is so funneh to you?

Boon Sergeant: it's your accent. It's so... funneh.

Sergeant Ama, aiyoh – I don't have a funneh accent. I do not have a funny accent at all! It is you people who speak English with a funneh accent!

Boon My accent is perfectly fine!

Sergeant And so is mine!

Boon But –

Sergeant *(interrupts)* Ah?

Pause.

Boon Nothing.

Sergeant Ah. Okay. So what lesson are we having now?

Boon Jungle survival training, sergeant!

Sergeant Good. So today, I am going to be teaching you on jungle survival training.

Because if really, really you get lost in the jungle, then as a soldier, you have to think of how to survive so that you can live to fight for another day.

One of the ways is to kill for food, which is what we are learning now. We were supposed to do from biggest to smallest, and I had a goat for you all. But someone didn't lock the fence so it ran away.

So today, no goat. We will start with chicken first.

The SERGEANT rummages in the sack and brings a chicken out.

Sergeant Aiyoh, ama.

Boon What's wrong, Sergeant?

Sergeant The chicken died already. *(Pause.)* Nevermind, we will carry on with the lesson still. For the chicken, you have to hold its neck between your second and third fingers, swing it around your head, then whack it on the floor or table to snap its neck. Like this.

The SERGEANT demonstrates. BOON applauds and encourages the rest of the audience to applaud too.

Sergeant Dei, you think what, President's Star Charity ah? As far as I'm concerned, there is only one Nathan here, and that Nathan is you, because you are a cockanaden! *(bits BOON with the chicken)* Stop it ah, I'm warning you. Anyway, take note that for the chicken killing, it is not so easy to break its neck. Most times, the neck breaks halfway and the chicken doesn't die, so you get a flapping chicken and the neck bent at 45 degrees.

Okay, now we move on to the rabbit.

The SERGEANT rummages in the sack and brings a rabbit out.

Sergeant You can see that when I leave the army, my second career can be a magician. Anyway, for the rabbit, it knows it is going to die. So first, you must soothe it by stroking it and talking to it, like how you talk to your friend.

“Hello, bunny, how are you today? Have you eaten yet? How are your parents?”

So once it is calm, you take your hand and karate chop in the middle of its body and break its spine. Like this.

The SERGEANT demonstrates. BOON winces.

Sergeant Sometimes, if you are accurate, you can make the rabbit squeak like a toy. You know those children's toys, you press then got the squeaky noise? Ah, the rabbit also can.

Okay, good. So we are done with the animal killing, does anyone have any questions?

Boon Sergeant.

Sergeant Yes?

Boon Why are we learning all this?

Sergeant What do you mean? It's a jungle survival training, we are teaching you how to –

Boon I know, Sergeant. But there are no goats, chickens or rabbits in the jungle! So why are we learning how to kill –

Sergeant Like I already said, we are training you to survive in the jungle. Because when you have no food, whatever you kill or whatever you eat is not going to matter, as long as you are alive. Understand?

Silence.

Boon Yes, Sergeant.

Sergeant Good. Any other questions?

Silence.

Sergeant Okay, outstanding, if no more questions, we will commence the practice session. Can I have one volunteer?

Silence. A rumbling sound is heard.

Fadeout.

SCENE TEN

The same setting, but now BOON and CHARLIE are very weak and are slumped in the seats of the vehicle. The squall of radio transmission is heard.

Radio ...come in, please...

Boon Charlie.

Charlie Sir?

Boon Is your stomach making noise again?

Charlie No.

The squall of radio transmission.

Boon Then what's that sound?

Radio ...come in, please...

Charlie Sir! Quick, the radio!

Boon Hello, HQ! This is Tango Bravo Delta Whiskey Mike! Request for authorisation to speak with your Echo Hotel Sierra Lima Golf! (pause) And Quebec!

The sound of static.

Charlie Sir, you say so long they already left to go for smoke break lah.

Boon Shut up!

The squall of radio transmission.

Radio Hello? Hello!

Boon Hello, HQ! Come in please!

Radio Hello, is this Tango... Bravo... Delta...

Boon Yes, yes, it's us!

Radio Where have you been? We have been trying to contact you for the last few days! Why have you not responded?

Boon What! We were trying to contact you for the last few days! Why didn't you guys respond either?

Radio Don't talk nonsense! We were manning our communications posts all the way. Except when we had to go for a smoke break. Anyway have you gone to where you were supposed to go?

Boon No. But what were we supposed to do there when we reached?

Radio Don't ask me, the next HQ was supposed to have told you. Anyway you have not reached there yet, so you are not supposed to know. Where is your location now?

Boon Our location? Our location is... Er... We have misplaced our position.

Charlie *(aside)* Lost then say lost, lah.

Boon And our vehicle is down too.

Radio Are there any casualties?

Boon None.

Radio Great. If not, that would be another report for you to write when you get back, along with the report about the vehicle and the report about the mission. Not forgetting the report about the exercise. Oh, and speaking of which, you do know about Echo Charlie right?

Charlie Charlie!

Boon Not you, idiot! What do you mean Echo Charlie?

Radio What else can we mean by Echo Charlie? You mean you want to go on?

Charlie What is he trying to say? Why is he asking me to echo my own name?

Boon He's not talking about you, fool! Echo Charlie means 'Exercise Cut'! That means the exercise is over!

Charlie Exercise Cut? But...

Radio Echo Charlie took place three days ago. Commander's orders. He said something about some...

Boon Three days ago! But that was when we set off for the mission! Why didn't they tell us earlier? Why didn't they tell us even before we set off? Then we wouldn't have to be here in this stupid place!

A rumbling sound is heard.

Charlie Sir?

Boon What?

Charlie So now how? I really cannot tahan my hunger already!

Boon Tsk. You hungry you think I not hungry meh? Aiyah! HQ, can you arrange for another vehicle to come by our position and get us out of here?

Charlie Sir, if we don't even know where we are, how the hell will they find us?

Boon Shut up, Charlie, that's enough from you already! HQ, are you coming to get us?

The sound of static.

Boon Hello! HQ! Come in!

The sound of static.

Charlie Sir.

The sound of static. BOON puts down the radio and slowly turns to look at CHARLIE. A rumbling sound is heard.

Charlie Sir?

Blackout.

Charlie Sir!

THE END.